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The Boise Forte Indian Reservation in Minnesota.

By Albert B. Reagan.

The Bois(e) Fort(e) Chippewa Indians live in northern Minnesota on a reservation of the same name surrounding the beautiful Nett Lake. The reservation covers one whole township and eight fractional townships. Its eastern part is in St. Louis County, the bulk of it in Koochiching County. It contains a total of 103,862.73 acres, exclusive of the area of the lake. Of this area, 55,646.43 acres are allotted to 693 Indians, 48,216.30 acres remain unallotted, and 434.64 is reserved for agency and school purposes. Of the 48,216.30 acres unallotted much of it has been reserved by the Government as pine lands and from time to time the timber on parts of the said lands has been sold under sealed bids, the closing out sale occurring September 15, this year. In all the timber on 9,533.70 acres has been sold, 3,233.77 being sold September 15, 6,299.93 having been sold previously. The other unallotted lands will be subject to settlement as homestead lands in the near future. There will also be something like 30,000 acres of Inherited Indian lands to be sold within the next two years.

Nett Lake is in the east central part of the reservation. It is more than half a township in area. It is in the shape of a giant lobster's hand with the claws pointing eastward, the large claw being the north digit. The lake is shallow and has a mud buttom. It is a rice field and a duck pond combined. In summer, it looks like a vast wheat field. In the fall it swarms with ducks and consequently is a sporting center for the hunters of all this northern country.

The lands included in the reservation are well timbered. The principal species represented are white and Norway pine, spruce, cedar, elm, cottonwood, oak, birch, and poplar. The latter two are the most abundant and will be of value some day as pulp wood.

The land of the reservation is very variable in condition of soil and possible fertility. One-half of it is swamp and is known to the Indians as "Muskeg" lands. Over this area there is a stratum of peat from six inches to five feet in thickness. When once drained this will be the best

land in the country. The non-swamp eastern part of the reservation is composed of rock-ridges flanked with lower land. These lower stretches are clay flats covered with black loam. On them grow birch and poplar forests; and when cleared they will make fine farms of the dairy type. Roots and grass do well on such lands. The ridge lands are the pine lands and will not be of much value, except for building sites and orchard locations.

The western part of the reservation that is not covered with "muskeg" swamp is a sand region. On it grew much pine in the old times; but when cleared it will be practically worthless, as is some pine lands east of the south lobe of the lake.

The region about Little Fork River is in the southwestern part of the reservation. It will make good farm land when cleared. Some open areas are fine meadows now.

The surface material, except that on the ridges, was left on the retreat of the glaciers. Its depth varies from nothing on the ridges to 200 feet in the pre-glacial intervalley spaces. The irregular dumping of this material and the partial filling of ancient valleys has produced the lakes of the country. In composition, this material varies very much. In the eastern part of the reservation it is composed principally of ground moraine material—a blue clay filled with boulders. Some of these are found to be of local origin; others to have been transported from a region far to the north. At other places on the reservation, the formation appears to be practically pure sand. On the rock ridges the glacial debris is entirely wanting, but instead the exposed rocks show the glacial scratchings.

The climate is very changeable in this part, ranging from 102 degrees above zero in summer to 60 degrees below in winter. The average summer is too cool for corn, and wheat has never been tried. Oats does fairly well.

The Indians have been allotted nearly twenty years; yet not one of them has ever made any effort to improve his allotment. As yet there is little inducement for them to improve them. There is no market where they could sell their produce. Furthermore it would cost $100 per acre to clear the land, which is rather a big undertaking for a poverty-stricken Indian. In addition, there is rice growing in the lake and plenty of game in the woods and water fowl among the rice in the lake. Why should he labor to clear his land?

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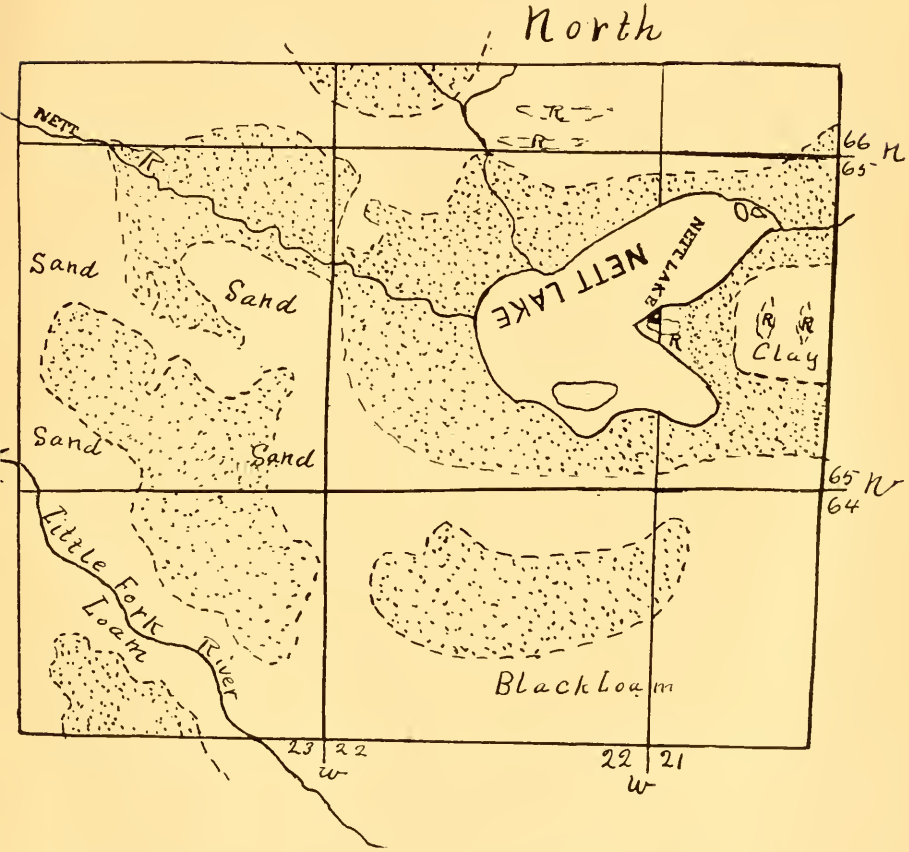
Below is a surface map of the reservation, showing the formations as they occur. (The original country rock is not shown.)



MAP OF THE BOIS FORT INDIAN RESERVATION IN MINNESOTA.

The dotted areas are swamp, or "Muskeg," to use the Indian term. "R" stands for rock ridge. The other kinds of land are designated on the map. Any one examining this map could not blame the Indians for petitioning the Honorable Commissioner to have lieu lands allotted to them for their swampy allotments.

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